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Lynne Mattocks Lucas

CBC Newsletter

for members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., ornithological society of the Carolinas

Volume 50 February 2005 Number 1

A Blue Ridge Spring

By Lori Martin

What could be more pleasing than a beautiful spring morning in the Blue Ridge Mountains? Close your eyes and imagine the chips of migrating warblers as they make their way north through the still, leafless forests of Blowing Rock. Imagine the glorious bouquet of wildflowers to be seen and marveled at, and the freshly winged butterflies to watch in awe. Sound like fun? Then you should join us at our spring meeting, which will be on **April 29-May 1, 2005.**

At our Boone/Blowing Rock meetings in the past, we have had great luck with finding warblers in their celebrated spring plumages. Our trips will be to locations in and around the Blue Ridge escarpment. We will also be able to bird at the Wagner Property, a unique and varied marsh habitat, which is privately owned in Happy Valley. Who knows? Maybe we'll even turn up another King Rail in Valle Crucis!

Nicole White Kennedy

Our Friday evening speaker will be Curtis Smalling, Mountain Biologist with Audubon North Carolina. And as for our Saturday evening program? Well, let's just say we're going to do something different—something our Club has never done. It's a surprise, and you won't know unless you're there!!!

The meeting will be held in Blowing Rock at the Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds/Conference Center (1442 Goforth Road, Blowing Rock, NC 28605, 828-295-7813, www.ucc-brag.org). We will have the entire facility to bird and socialize in for the weekend! Room rates are $70 per night for single or double occupancy. All reservations must be guaranteed by credit card or advanced payment of a first night's room by April 11, 2005. The facility also offers buffet-style meals and will require pre-registration. More information about this and the field trips will be in the next newsletter. Hope to see you there!

Upcoming CBC Meetings

Charleston, SC - September 30-October 2, 2005

Virginia Beach - Winter 2006

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 18-21

Hosted by National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Help track birds in your community by reporting your sightings at www.birdsource.org.

Migrate with Me Through 41 Years

By Susan J. Russo, Interpretive Ranger at Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Close your eyes and imagine the world 41 years ago from today . . . the Apollo program is launched to "land humans on the Moon and bring them back to Earth,"; Washington-to-Moscow "hot line" communications link opens, which was designed to reduce the risk of accidental war; Pope John XXIII dies; Kenya achieves its independence; 15,000 military advisers are in South Vietnam; the first artificial heart is implanted in a human at a Houston hospital; The LA Dodgers defeat the NY Yankees in the World Series; a stamp costs $0.05; unemployment is at 5.5%; "March on Washington," a civil rights rally held by 200,000 people takes place and Martin Luther King delivers his "I have a dream" speech; President John F. Kennedy is shot and killed in Dallas, TX; his accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald is shot and killed by Jack Ruby; The Beatles "take Britain by storm; AND Pungo National Wildlife Refuge is established.

With all that was happening in our country from war to landmark civil rights movements, our federal government saw through all of this the necessity to establish and protect national lands for the benefit of wildlife and the American people. The 12,000 acre Pungo Unit (of the 110,000 acre Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge [NWR]) was established in 1963 as an inviolate waterfowl sanctuary—not to be violated, a scared place to be kept in tact. Why would the government have seen this as a necessity with all of the tragedy taking place in our country and the onset of war? In an interview with the Refuge Biologist, Wendy Stanton, the importance of the refuge can be made clear:

What are the largest populations of migratory waterfowl at Pocosin Lakes NWR? More than 200 species of birds winter, breed, or stopover here. The largest populations are the Greater Snow Goose: 70,000; Tundra Swan: 20,000; Green-winged Teal: 6,000; and Mallards: 4,000.

Why is Pocosin Lakes NWR so important to these birds? The large bodies of water and the cooperative farm fields are a "hot" food for them. The foods found here are high in carbohydrates, which are good for their energy and reserves. Swans were pushed south to the refuge because of habitat degradation in the Chesapeake Bay area. In the last 15 years, they have adapted to coming to the refuge and feeding in farm fields.

How does Pocosin Lakes NWR manage for the wintering waterfowl? We maintain productive moist soil units and work with local farmers to keep the cooperative farm fields in production and by keeping the water in the lakes.

How long do the birds stay at the refuge? They stay from mid-November to mid-March. The first full moon of November marks the onset of the waterfowl migration. They migrate south because their food sources become very scarce due to the coverage of snow and ice. The birds can withstand the cold temperatures, but not without their food.

Where are all of these birds migrating back to when they leave the refuge by March? Our ducks head back to the Prairie Pothole region—North and South Dakota, Minnesota, and Canada. The geese and swans will go farther north to the Artic. We get this information by leg bands and satellite collars. We work with state wildlife agencies to collect this information.

How does it make you feel knowing that you are a primary caretaker of these birds and contribute to their survival? I love it!

Any additional comments? This area (northeastern NC) has more than 80% of the wintering population of Atlantic flyway Tundra Swans. That is very significant. This area is one of the few remaining areas on the east coast for wildlife. We need to remember how valuable that is.

The next time you are traveling through eastern North Carolina, remember to visit Pocosin Lakes NWR and see for yourself how magical these birds are and imagine if the refuge never existed.

Just Outside the Window *By Donna Slyce*

Winter Song and Hermit Thrush It was with some surprise that I noted a thrush other than Eastern Bluebird at the feeder in a recent spell of bad weather. The winter-resident *Catharus*, a Hermit Thrush, was seen scratching about under the feeders as vigorously as the numerous White-throated Sparrows and finding some food item amongst the leaves. Perhaps the Hermit Thrush was finding bits of raisin dropped by the bluebirds or the not quite so fastidious Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice.

The Hermit Thrush is renowned among birdwatchers as a singer of the highest caliber. Among those who have heard both species, it is said that the Hermit Thrush is at least equal, if not superior, to the Nightingale. Interestingly the Nightingale is a member of an Old World genera of the thrush family, *Luscinia*, while the Hermit Thrush is a member of the New World genera of the thrush family, *Catharus*.

It is our good fortune here in the Carolinas, where the Hermit Thrush winters in good numbers, that Hermit Thrush is one of a number of birds who will begin singing their breeding song before they depart for their summer residences. White-throated, Song, and Fox Sparrows, as well as Blue-headed Vireo and Winter Wren, also sing complete breeding songs before departing over-wintering sites in the Carolinas. These "winter singers" sing partial breeding songs throughout the winter, consisting of songs that lack opening phrases, songs that lack ending phrases, "slowed-down" songs (as though the bird were singing at half-speed), or muffled songs (as though the bird were singing at half-volume). As the days lengthen and the air warms in late February and March, one can hear complete and almost complete breeding songs from the "winter singers".

While those "winter singers" can be heard throughout the winter, the Hermit Thrush is a quiet presence in winter. It is in very late March to early April that the Hermit Thrush begins to sing, mere weeks before they leave. The first of the summer-resident wood warblers, Yellow-throated Warbler and Northern Parula, have already returned and are in full throat before one can hope to happen upon a singing Hermit Thrush.

Perhaps on a cloudless, crystal, pink April morning, just as the sunlight reaches the treetops, a Hermit Thrush may decide to grace the nearby patch of scruffy second-growth woods with that heavenly voice—that voice that will consecrate a ragtag stand of sweetgum and pine saplings into a sanctuary from the roil and turmoil of the mundane, and the noisy with music pure and sacred.

I hope my patch of woods is so graced. I think I'll throw some raisins under the feeder for the Hermit Thrush next time.

New Members

Parker Backstrom-Pittsboro, NC
Doreen & Jim Cubie-Awendaw, SC
Adam DeWilte-Charlotte, NC
Carol Fischer-Cary, NC
John Grego-Columbia, SC
Thomas & Carla Ledford-Monroe, NC
Donna MacLennan-Sanford, NC
Barbara Massey-Starr, SC
Karen Resmer-Charlotte, NC
Jamie Rotenberg & Vibeke Olsen-Wilmington, NC
Michael Sullivan-Leland, NC
Jack Thigpen-Raleigh, NC
Ron & Garnet Underwood-Hiddenite, NC
Peter Vankevich-Washington, DC
Joanna Wright-Raleigh, NC

Deceased

Carol Bacik-Buxton, NC

To all members, if you move, please notify the Headquarters Secretary with your new address in order to continue delivery of the *CBC Newsletter* and *The Chat*.

Birding and Rafting Through the Grand Canyon *By Keith E. Camburn*

On my "must do list" was to raft through the Grand Canyon so I jumped at the chance in July of 2004 to join 15 science educator friends for a trip down the Colorado River. As a prelude for this trip I read Edward Dolnick's book on Captain John Wesley Powell's unbelievable trip through the Canyon in 1869 entitled "Down the Great Unknown". I was hoping that our trip would have more comforts, better food, and have more success running rapids than Captain Powell and his crew.

Upon arriving at Lee's Ferry our guides, Scott and Jack of Hatch River Adventures, reviewed safety concerns, dehydration (a big killer in the Grand Canyon), river etiquette, and they informed us that the bathroom at Lee's Ferry was the last one we would see for the next six days. Due to the large number of people rafting the river human waste is an environmental concern. All urination must occur directly into the river and all solid waste must be carried out of the Canyon. This is not as bad as it sounds!!!

I spoke with a ranger to get the latest updates on California Condor sightings within the Canyon. The last "wild" condors in California were captured in 1986 to establish a captive breeding program. In 1997 eight condors were released near the Grand Canyon to reestablish a breeding population. On November 5, 2003, a wild born condor was successfully fledged by captive-produced parents and two additional chicks hatched in 2004. These three chicks increased the world population to 244 (131 held in captivity) and the Arizona population to 49.

Obviously the running of rapids is one of the drawing cards of this trip. Although Lava Falls Rapids is the most famous and feared, Crystal Rapids is responsible for more deaths. We went through Hance, Hermit, Crystal, and Upset rapids with no problems. I was truly frightened as we approached Lava Falls Rapids. While scouting the rapids Scott was concerned as a rescue helicopter was below the rapids doing an evacuation. Not a good sign!!! Going through this rapids was one of the best 30 seconds of my life. Lava Falls is the fastest navigable rapids in the world flowing at 57 mph so you go through fast.

During this six day trip I recorded a total of 37 species. Common species included Black and Say's Phoebe, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Violet-green Swallow, and Canyon Wren. Our most dramatic campsite was at the mouth of Nankoweap Creek. Not only did this site contain Anasazi ruins and breathtaking views, but it supported singing Bell's Vireos as well as the handsome *chryseola* subspecies of the Common Yellowthroat. The avian highlight of the trip was the sighting of three condors. After leaving the raft for a hike I noticed a large soaring bird pass behind a peak and within moments three condors emerged and all in the group were able to see these magnificent birds.

In summary, I saw more birds actually living within the Canyon than I expected for such a hostile environment. I was thrilled to see three condors, and although this species is not currently ABA "countable", it is proudly placed on my "Swiss Bird Account List." On the last morning a helicopter landed on the sand and unfortunately whisked us all back to reality. Even after 186 miles on the river I was ready to continue further "Down the Great Unknown." *Editor's note: Keith has had the chance to bird over much of the world, and said this was "the best trip I've taken in my life." Keith is on the NC Bird Records Committee.*

Summer Birding in Wales and Denmark *By Ernie Marshall*

Although Europe typically conjures thoughts of interesting cultures and cuisines rather than of cool birding, the subcontinent has a rich avifauna. Peterson's *Birds of Britain and Europe* (Houghton Mifflin, 1993), for example, describes a total of 698 species.

This past summer my wife Karen and I did our best to get our share of these birds, and tallied a total of 107 species. Following a conference in which Karen participated at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, we divided three weeks of birding time in late July and early August between Wales and Denmark. *Continued on the following page*

Summer Birding in Wales and Denmark continued

Our birding itinerary in Wales took us north from Aberystwyth, a lovely old city hugging the shore of Cardigan Bay, to the island of Anglesey, then back south through Snowdonia National Park to mid-Wales, and finally south and west to the Pembrokeshire coast.

Karen and I had birded Britain and Denmark before, but Wales was new territory for us and there were plenty of European bird species we had yet to see. Our target birds for Wales were Black Grouse, Red Kite, Pied Flycatcher, Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Ring Ouzel, and Chough. [Throughout I use the British common name wherever different from the American.] We got the Red Kite at Nant yr Arian Forest Park, the Kingfisher at the Teifi Marshes Nature Preserve, and the Chough on the Pembrokeshire Coastal Trail. Our excuse for "dipping" (as Brit birders say) on the Black Grouse and Ring Ouzel is that rainy weather prevented us from doing much birding at Snowdonia, the birds' most likely habitat.

Among the other birds we saw in Wales were Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, not *Setophaga ruticilla*), Stone Chat, Wheatear, Song Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Linnet, Gannet (*Sula bassana*), and Fulmar (*Fulmaris glacialis*).

Birding the Pembrokeshire Coastal Trail, with breathtaking views from sea cliffs, was a fine climax to our birding experience in Wales. From there we drove to Heathrow Airport to turn in our rental car, and took the London Underground across the breadth of the city to Liverpool Street Station. Then we got a train to Harwich, and boarded a ferry to Esbjerg, Denmark. The 19-hour ferry ride was as delightful and relaxing as the trip across London on the Underground was nerve-wracking.

So began the Denmark leg of our bird quest. We did not get any pelagics on the boat trip, but the birding was nonstop once we docked. Our gracious birder friends, Hanne and Ole Post, with whom we stayed, met us at the ferry and we stopped at the first good spot for birding. The site yielded 17 species, including Northern Lapwing, Ruff, Greenshank, Greylag Goose, Common Sandpiper, Curlew, Black-necked Grebe, White Wagtail, Magpie (*Pica pica*), and Green Finch. What a nice birders' welcome to Denmark!

We birded various spots in Jutland, including several days on the west coast. In addition to late summer nesters, e.g., grebes and their chicks, shorebird migration was well underway, so there was lots of birding yet for Karen and me. Our last day we went back to the coast prompted by a rare bird alert. A Mongolian Plover had been spotted. It required a four-wheel drive to get to where it was reported, which we lacked. "Naeste gang!" (Next time!) as they say in Denmark.

As we were leaving to start our journey home, Ole got a call about a possible Ring Ouzel nearby, presumably an early migrant from Norway. "Hey Karen, our target Ring Ouzel after all! Just tell them to hold the plane on the tarmac!" Ole emailed us when we got home that it turned out to be a leucistic Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). But birders can always dream!

CBC's Trinidad and Tobago Trip a Great Success

By Bill Sugg

Oilbirds, tropicbirds, motmots, trogons, antbirds, bellbirds. The list of tropical exotics could go on and on. All can be seen up close and personal when visiting the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. This island nation is just off the northeastern coast of South America, near Venezuela.

In November 2004, The Carolina Bird Club sponsored a ten-day trip to those magic isles. It was a trip to a birder's heaven. Simon Thompson, owner of Ventures, Inc., was the nonpareil group leader assisted by locals on the scene. Twelve hardy birders rounded out the Carolina contingency.

On Trinidad our base was the Asa Wright Nature Centre at 1,200 feet above the Arima Valley. We walked the trails on the Centre grounds and took van excursions to explore an incredible variety of habitats in the valley and on the coast.

Continued on the following page

Trinidad and Tobago continued

The verandah at Asa Wright is a destination in itself. Surrounded by hummingbird feeders and overlooking fruit and bread-laden feeders on the ground, it is not unusual to have 20 or more species in view at any time of day. It is common to have six or more species of hummingbirds, along with Bananaquits and honeycreepers, vying for space at the feeders. Another dozen species are on the ground including Bare-eyed Thrush, Ruddy Ground-Dove, Crested Oropendola, and several tanager species. Palm Tanagers are nesting on the porch. Several in our group had 25 lifers before breakfast! The helpful staff was always available and had scopes at the ready to show a distant Ornate Hawk-Eagle or Double-toothed Kite.

Rufous-tailed Jacamar, by Simon Thompson

Asa Wright has a special place on its grounds: Dunstan Cave, one of the most accessible sites in the world to see Oilbirds. These large—with a wingspan of 3.5 feet—nocturnal fruit-eaters roost there. This bird leaves the roost at dusk and, navigating by a sort of sonar, finds his food by smell and hovers over the fruit to eat it.

One afternoon we traveled to another special place, Caroni Swamp, a large mangrove swamp on the west coast of Trinidad. We got into a powerboat to travel the few miles to one of the most spectacular sights of the whole trip. On the way Green-throated Mango and Red-capped Cardinal were seen. And our boat passed under at least one Trinidad Red Tail Boa Constrictor.

Toward dusk they began arriving. First in small numbers, twos, and threes. Then the numbers expanded until it seemed the whole sky was full of flapping scarlet. Hundreds, thousands of Scarlet Ibis were coming to an island in a Caroni Swamp lake. The ibis were joined by hundreds of Tricolored Herons that roost on the same island.

Tobago was only a short flight away. Unfortunately, severe rainstorms just before our arrival hit Tobago, which was recovering from hurricane Ivan. Mudslides throughout the eastern part of the island were very serious and presented a major obstacle to travel by foot and by vehicle. The Blue Water Inn, on the northeast tip of the island, was our base. We found Blue-crowned Motmots roosted on the lights of some of the rooms' balconies.

From the Inn it was just a short boat ride to Little Tobago Island to see nesting Red-billed Tropicbird and Red-footed Booby. At Bon Accord lagoon we had good views of Little Egret as well as Blue-black Grassquit and Red-crowned Woodpecker. A couple of days later, in Gilpin Trace in the Main Ridge Forest Preserve we saw White-tailed Sabrewing and Collared Trogon.

On the last night we tallied up the trip totals and came up with 198 species. Two more were added the next morning at a brief stop on the way to the airport: Ring-necked Duck and Green Heron. Grand total: 200!

Thanks to the Carolina Bird Club for its

CBC group on Gilpin Trace Trail in Tobago, by Simon Thompson

sponsorship of these extralimital trips!

Feathered Features

Pocosin Lakes Wildlife Festival April 23 Environmental and ecotourism agencies of eastern NC will share opportunities that exist in the area for nature appreciation and awareness. Activities will include Black Bear tracking tours, canoeing and kayaking, bird walks, plant identification, geological history presentation of the area by the Columbia High School Science Club, endangered Red Wolf exhibit, and a grand opening celebration of the Palemetto-Peartree-Preserve. Rain date will be Saturday, April 30. For more information call 252-796-3004 or write to pocosinlakes@fws.gov.

Upcoming NC Partners In Flight Meetings: Mark your calendar now for two upcoming meetings: 2005 Annual Meeting at Howell Woods in Johnston County, March 23, with a theme of "bird migration" and 2005 Fall NC Partners In Flight Meeting at Goose Creek State Park, October 19, with a theme of "bird conservation on industrial forestland". Contact Mark Johns, Partners in Flight Biologist, for more information at 919- 852-5124 or johnsme@mindspring.com.

Environment and the Nobel Peace Prize Kenyan Environmentalist, Wangari Maathai, was awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, "for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy, and peace." Maathai, Deputy Minister for the Environment in Kenya, founded the Green Belt Movement on June 5, 1977, World Environment Day. She and Kenyan women have planted millions of trees since then, with the goal to restore Africa's forests and put an end to the poverty that deforestation was causing. "The environment is very important in the aspects of peace because when we destroy our resources and our resources become scarce, we fight over that," said Maathai. For more information about Maathai and the peace prize visit http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/2004/.

Important Bird Areas After six years of study, Audubon North Carolina announced the release of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of North Carolina in November 2004, a scientific assessment of the most important habitats for birds in the state. The publication, to be used as a conservation planning tool, identifies 92 places that are important for breeding, migrating, and over-wintering birds. Over the next three years, Audubon will focus its conservation efforts on a number of priority sites across the state. These focal IBAs are places where opportunities for acquisition or other protections of vulnerable lands are available, where current management needs improvement, and/or where additional data collection is needed. A pdf-format version of the report is available for downloading at http://www.ncaudubon.org/nccas_ibas.html, or may be mailed on disc by requesting a copy through email or phone to Walker Golder at wgolder@audubon.org or 910/686-7527.

Rob Sewell

Mark your calendars now for some more fun CBC's bonus trips!

Simon and Stephen's Minnesota trip in February is full.
On April 16 John Cely will lead a birding trip in Charleston, SC.
June 1-10 (dates still tentative) Simon Thompson will be leading another CBC trip, this time to Churchill, Manitoba, Canada.
August 27, Dwayne Martin and Lori Martin will lead a trip at Ridge Junction Overlook, just down the road from Mt. Mitchell, on the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina.

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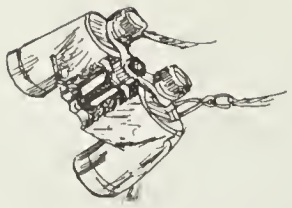

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April 16, Charleston, SC
June 1-10, Churchill, Manitoba
August 27, Ridge Junction Overlook, NC

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